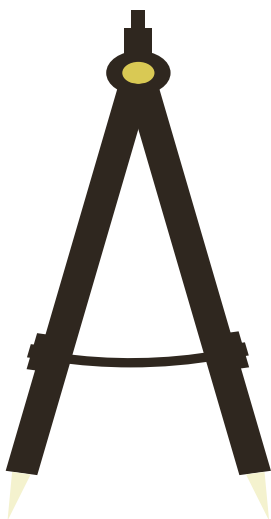


ASCD STUDY GUIDE

Smarter Assessment in the Secondary Classroom



INTRODUCTION

1. What are you hoping to learn from this video?

2. To what extent does assessment in your classroom promote learning?

3. Do the assessment routines in your classroom promote problem solving and deeper thinking, or do they replicate the rote memorization tasks of previous eras?

4. Is poverty a reality for students in your community, and do grading rules exacerbate the challenges these students already face? Which grading policies serve to reduce the disparities between students?



TOPIC 1: GRADING

1. To what extent do you agree with Shona Becker's views on the separation of academics and behaviors in the "real-world" environment? Do your grades reflect the extent to which students understand the learning outcomes? If not, how are behaviors blended with grades?

2. Can you identify areas in your practice where punitive grading is used to manipulate behavior? Is there an alternative behavioral response you could use to establish or maintain grading accuracy?

3. To what extent do your grades meet the standards of reliability, precision, and meaningfulness?

4. Which is more prevalent in your department or school: the 4-, 5-, or 6-point performance scale or the 100-point scale? What do you see as the pros and cons of the novice (1/2), apprentice (3/4), and expert (5/6) system highlighted in this video?

5. Rachel Stubbert suggests that her professional discretion increases when she uses a 1–6 point performance scale. Do you agree?



6. Both Marnie Mennell and Rachel Stubbart indicate that their students know exactly where they are in the grading scene and can reflect on their performance. Would your students be able to accurately determine their grade? If not, what structures could you introduce to increase student ownership of grading and reporting structures?

7. Naryn Searcy has opinions on late deductions and zeros: “I do not apply late deductions because, if I did, I would not be assessing [students’] abilities but rather their work habits. . . . I have never used a zero. . . . It is hard to assess something that has not been done—how could I possibly give a mark to something that doesn’t exist?” To what extent do you share these views and why?

8. Are there zeros in your grade book that represent missing assignments, cheating, or cases where a student was there but failed to demonstrate understanding? If so, how do you tell what each zero represents?

9. Do students in your classroom or school receive grade penalties for factors outside of their control? What are ways you could make sure student grades most closely align with factors within their control?

10. To what extent are your students focused on grades rather than learning? What is one thing you do or could do to shift the focus toward learning?



TOPIC 2: HOMEWORK: WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

1. Completion does not equal understanding. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Does your belief influence your view of homework?

2. Consider the portion of your grading that involves assessing “uniform homework.” Do you consider this to be a valuable use of your professional assessment skills?

3. Ben Arcuri does not score his students’ homework; rather, he uses quiz results to inform their next learning steps. What is your view of his response to the quiz data determining whether an assessment is formative or summative?

4. To what extent do you believe that constant grading leads to “extrinsic dependency”? Can you identify areas in your school where grades are inflated or deflated by homework grading? Are uniform homework tasks one of these areas?

5. Scott Harkness delivers content in the form of short videos that students watch at home or “outside the timetable.” He then uses class time to reinforce the concepts. What is your opinion of this flipped model where students essentially do their homework in class? Based on what you saw in the video and your own opinions, what are some advantages and disadvantages of this approach?



6. Work ethic, responsibility, and effort are all valuable traits. Does grading homework help to develop these traits or just reward those who already have them?

7. Shona Becker checks homework for completion and provides support for students to complete it, but she does not grade it. What are the pros and cons of this approach?

8. If assistance on homework varies from parent to parent, is it fair to grade homework assignments and attach the scores to individual students?

9. How rampant are the claims of test anxiety in your classroom, and to what extent do you think that homework grading strategies might contribute to these claims?

10. What are the major barriers to homework completion in your school, and could some of these barriers be overcome without the threat or use of grading penalties?



TOPIC 3: UNIT PLANS/CLEAR LEARNING TARGETS

1. Of the four types of targets—knowledge, reasoning, skill, and product—which is most common in your classroom assessments? What do you think might be a healthy balance between knowledge and reasoning learning targets?

2. Examine Shona Becker’s and Scott Harkness’s use of reflection in preparing students to take the next steps in learning or demonstrating their learning. What are elements that put students in the “driver’s seat” of the learning experience?

3. A student in Scott Harkness’s class says, “[Clear targets] show that [teachers] are not trying to trick us.” To what extent do you think that blurry or nonexistent learning targets contribute to student confusion, stress, or frustration?

4. Marnie Mennell comments that “learning targets guide my practice.” To what extent do clear learning targets guide you as a teacher?

5. Building effective unit plans can be labor intensive. Can you think of any team structures in your school that would facilitate this process?



TOPIC 4: RETESTING

1. Consider the two test structures mentioned in the video: topic-based sections (learning outcomes) and format-based sections (T/F, multiple choice, etc.). Which structure do you prefer? Which is essential to a standards-based grading system?

2. Whether an assessment is formative or summative depends on how the teacher and students react to and use the data. To what extent are your assessments able to fit into either category?

3. Rachel Stubbert replaced her review assignment system with a practice test system. List the advantages and disadvantages of her practice test system.

4. How might your department respond to students who clearly are not ready for a major assessment?

5. Does your school champion and celebrate mastery learning? If so, what specific structures and routines are in place to do so?



6. List a few supports you might suggest (or require) students to use or have prior to taking a retest.

7. Do you or your students perceive a difference between a retest system and a pretest system? Which do you prefer and why?

8. Do you use testing data as a formative assessment of your teaching? If so, what do you do if a particular concept appears to have been missed by a large section of the class?

9. To what extent is your classroom an environment where failure is seen as a natural step in the learning process?

10. What are some points for and against homework completion being a prerequisite for retesting?

11. How do students benefit from the opportunity to take tests in different ways? Do you think it is more important for all students to have the same test format or for all students to be tested on the same learning goals?



TOPIC 5: CREATIVITY

1. Which statement best characterizes your classroom or school?
 - My classroom/school stifles creativity.
 - My classroom/school tolerates creativity.
 - My classroom/school encourages creativity.

Consider the reasons for your response.

2. Shona Becker encourages movement and creativity in her classroom and believes they increase understanding, but she stops short of assessing creativity. Do you use this approach in your own teaching? Why or why not?

3. Can you recall a time in your classroom that a creative pursuit ended in frustration? Did this affect your desire to re-enter the creative forum? To what extent could this frustration have been prevented with a clear delineation of the learning outcomes?

4. How might the Project Planning Sheet serve to alleviate concerns that your students will miss the essential learning outcomes in the pursuit of creativity?



5. To what extent do your students have the green light to blend their own personal interests with classroom projects?

6. Is project-based learning alive and well in your classroom? If so, is it geared toward uniformity or individuality? Think of the factors that contribute to your response.

7. Naryn Searcy puts great emphasis on creativity and problem solving. To what extent are students provided a multimedia avenue to demonstrate their learning in your classroom/school?

8. Naryn Searcy looks for evidence of student learning through artistic expression while encouraging diversity for all learners. To what extent are students with different learning styles engaged in your classroom learning environment?



CONCLUSION

1. To what extent does your school form the main avenue by which students have access to positive adults and mentorship programs?

2. What are some of the policies and supports in your school that serve as a safety net to protect students from their negative living conditions?

3. If you were to conduct a policy audit in your school, what percentage of the rules and regulations would involve the opportunity for student input?

4. Do you believe that relationships are central to effective teaching? Why or why not?

5. What do you believe is the most critical factor in creating a great school? To what extent do your classroom policies, rules, and climate support this goal?
